

Reactions of Children to Disaster Preschool (Ages 1 - 5)

Children in this age group are particularly vulnerable. Because they generally aren't able to talk about how they are feeling, they look to trusted adults for comfort and are affected by the reactions of these individuals.

Being left by loved ones is a major fear in this age group, and they will need special reassurance.

Some ways adults may help:

- ◆ Say things to reassure the child
- ◆ Give hugs
- ◆ Give extra snacks
- ◆ Encourage talking about the event
- ◆ Provide comforting bedtime routines such as nightlights, special story time

Consider professional mental health services for children whose responses to the disaster are getting in the way of regular home life.

Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services

State of North Carolina * Department of Health and Human Services
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Although people of all ages share many feelings and reactions after a disaster, children need special attention.

Typical reactions for children of all ages:

- ◆ Fear of future disasters
- ◆ Behaviors they might have shown at an earlier age (such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking)
- ◆ Trouble sleeping
- ◆ Fear of events associated with the disaster
- ◆ Fear of being left by loved ones

Typical responses in this age group are:

- ◆ Thumb sucking/crying
- ◆ Bed-wetting
- ◆ Fear of the dark
- ◆ Clinging behavior
- ◆ Night terrors/nightmares
- ◆ Loss or increase of appetite/vomiting
- ◆ Nervousness/irritability
- ◆ Problems with separation from parent/siblings
- ◆ Daydreaming/distractibility